

Date of Hearing: April 26, 2011

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

Paul J. Cook, Chair

AB 1226 (Assembly Veterans Affairs Committee) – As Introduced: February 18, 2011

**SUBJECT:** Department of Veterans Affairs: annual report: county veterans service officer activities.

**SUMMARY:** Requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (Department) to include the percentage of veterans receiving, and how California ranks among all states in the percentage of veterans receiving, federal veteran compensation and pension benefits in annual County Veterans Service Officer (CVSO) reporting.

**EXISTING LAW:** Existing law requires the Department to annually prepare a report of the activities of CVSO, as specified, and may require each CVSO to submit information required to prepare the report. Existing law requires the following minimum information be included in the report:

- 1) The number of monthly federal benefit payments obtained on behalf of veterans;
- 2) The total value of those monthly benefit payments;
- 3) The average value of those monthly benefit payments;
- 4) The number of one-time benefit payments obtained, including both single-payment benefits and retroactive payments;
- 5) The total value of one-time benefit payments obtained; and
- 6) The average value of these one-time benefit payments obtained.

The report must break down each of the foregoing totals by county and include a statewide total. The Department is required to transmit a copy of the report to the Department of Finance, the Department of Health Services, and to each Member of the Legislature.

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown.

**COMMENTS:** California, home to approximately 2 million veterans, has the highest veteran population in the country. The state, however, falls below the national average with regard to the percentage of veterans receiving United States Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) benefits. A 2009 review by the Bureau of State Audits indicates that only 12.86 percent of veterans in California participate in federal benefit programs, compared to 16.72 percent and 14.88 percent in Texas and Florida. The national average is 13.94 percent.

In its 2010-2015 Business Plan, the Department states that it has an objective to “increase the percentage of veterans in California who receive USDVA compensation and benefits to at least the national average by 2014.”

Modifying the current reporting requirements to include USDVA benefits participation rates gives lawmakers additional information to evaluate the effectiveness of efforts to reach veterans and connect them with benefits. Additionally, such information provides the Legislature an opportunity to track the Department's progress toward its goal of improving California to the national average for USDVA benefit participation.

RELATED LEGISLATION:

AB 1209 (Cook, 2011) appropriates \$11 million to fund CVSO.

AB 882 (Cook, 2011) establishes the California Veterans Services and Workforce Development Division within the Department for the purpose of coordinating and administering veterans assistance programs in the state, and would require the division to perform various functions and duties relating to the coordination and administration of veterans assistance programs, as specified. The bill would require the administrative and support staff responsible for the administration of the specified programs to be transferred from the Employment Development Department to the division, and would require the costs of the transfer to utilize existing resources of the Department.

AB 1223 (Assembly Veterans Affairs Committee, 2011) implements the Public Assistance and Reporting Information System (PARIS) pilot-project statewide. Existing law provides for the Medi-Cal program, which is administered by the State Department of Health Care Services, under which qualified low-income individuals receive health care services. The Medi-Cal program is, in part, governed and funded by federal Medicaid Program provisions. Existing law requires the department to establish a 2-year pilot program to utilize the federal PARIS to identify veterans and their dependents or survivors who are enrolled in the Medi-Cal program and assist them in obtaining federal veterans' health care benefits. Existing law requires the department to select 3 counties, as specified, to participate in the pilot project and authorizes the department to implement the program statewide at any time and continue the operation of PARIS indefinitely if the department determines that the pilot program is cost effective. This bill removes the pilot project nature of these provisions and requires the department to implement this program statewide.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

American Legion-Department of California, AMVETS-Department of California, California State Commanders Veterans Council.

Opposition

None.

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